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Book Reviews

OLD BABYLONIAN LETTERS IN THE YALE COLLECTION

The second volume of cuneiform texts in the Yale Oriental Series¹ is the work of Dr. Lutz and contains a hundred and fifty-two letters practically all of which came from the mounds of Senkereh. Although the Babylonian letter-writer did not think it necessary to give the time and place of writing, it is ordinarily a comparatively easy matter for the modern scholar to determine these facts. The letters here published were written in the ancient city of Larsa, the Ellasar of the Bible, about 2000 B.C. They do not differ from the numerous other letters from this age which have survived. They contain the orders, requests, inquiries, denials, etc., which we expect to find in the business correspondence of any age or clime.

Since Dr. Lutz hopes to give full transliterations and translations of all of these letters elsewhere, only thirty-three of them are translated and discussed in this volume. Owing to style and content, the epistolary literature of the Babylonians often baffles the modern decipherer, and one is prepared to find differences of opinion as to the correct translation of a given letter. On the whole, Dr. Lutz's translations are satisfactory, but, while question marks inclosed in parentheses do not improve the appearance of a printed page, nevertheless, a liberal sprinkling of these would have given a clearer idea as to what is certain and what conjectural in the translations offered. For example: Line 14 of No. 63 (p. 25) is transliterated *10 ma-na ri-iš Gimillat-Sin* and the *ri-iš* of this line is compared with the Arabic *rīš* and translated "maintenance money." But neither the *ri* nor the *iš* is certain. The sign transliterated *iš* clearly seems to be the *du*-sign. Besides, we expect to find some word like "silver" or "wool" following the word for the measure, *mana*. Do we have a badly written *šepati šaplati* (cf. No. 45) in these signs? Again, in the translation of No. 45 (p. 27) the preposition *ana*, meaning "to" ("unto") or "for" is translated first by "from," then by "to," and finally by "into." But neither here nor in line 5 of No. 32 (p. 28) does the context call for a translation "from." In a number of cases where the reviewer finds himself at odds with Dr. Lutz, the reason may lie in the English used. One might be inclined to excuse translation English, but "undoubtedly," "it is inconceivable, but not altogether improbable" (p. 8, n. 1), "into the parental home introduce the thirty minas of lower grade wool" (p. 27), and dozens of similar atrocities are unpardonable and often unintelligible.

An index of the personal names found in these letters is added. Here I fail to see a good reason for entering *Awêl-ilNabium* and *Awil-ilNabium* as different names. The name of a deity found in text No. 1 is transcribed as *ilGál-gál-la*. If *gál* is used to transliterate the *ig*-sign, the same transliteration should not be used for the *gal*-sign. The name should probably be read *ilIg-gal-la*, meaning "god of the 'sublime porte.'" On pp. 5 f. there is a long discussion of the name *A-ba-ra-ha-am*, which is explained as the Babylonian form of a West Semitic name which was "reintroduced in the West in its Babylonian form" as אַבְרָהָם. Perhaps this is a "reasonable theory," but the reviewer regards it as a bit far-fetched.

The autographed copies of the texts are admirably done. Here Dr. Lutz shows himself the apt pupil of a skilful teacher.

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¹ *Early Babylonian Letters from Larsa*. By Henry Frederick Lutz. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917. xii+41 pages and 57 plates. \$5.00.